

# Employees Aren't Factory Slaves: Factors Determining Work Demand and Implications for HRM Practices

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## Abstract

Although a plethora of studies on factors determining work demand have been investigated in the West, the Western findings cannot be directly applied to another cultural context and there is still rather constraint studies in collectivist cultural nations. Drawing on the conservation of resources theory and Hofstede's cultural framework, the present study aims to fill a lacuna by identifying factors determining work demand in a collectivist cultural context. Anchored in ontological and epistemological assumptions, the study employed hypothetic-deductive approach with a survey strategy. Data were garnered from randomly selected 569 employees working in the banking sector with the aid of a self-administrated questionnaire. The results disclose that males work longer hours and experience greater work demand than females. The study further reveals the predictors of work demand: working hours had shown the largest impact, followed by tenure, gender, income, formal work-life policies and supervisory status. The present study questioned the worthiness of the equal policies for both men and women in the workplace and emphasised the needs for gender-based HR policies. On balance, the study pushes back the frontiers of work-family literature and becomes a springboard to future scholarly works.

**Keywords:** work demand, work-life policies, supervisory status, conservation of resources theory, Hofstede's cultural framework

## 1. Introduction

In more recent times, studies on work and family lives have been an increasing global focus and blossomed into multidisciplinary fields (Shockley et al., 2017). Work and family are inextricably interwoven in human life and work generates income essential for family functioning. Nonetheless, greater work demand is detrimental to organisation, individual and society such as work-family conflict, poor job performance, job/family dissatisfaction, fatigue, distress, frustration, turnover intentions, and poor employee wellbeing (e.g. Annor & Burchell, 2018; Kodom-Wiredu, 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018) and consequently, studies emphasise on the importance of understanding factors determining work demand (Boyar, Carr, Mosley, & Carson, 2007). Although there are a plethora of studies on work demand in the context of western culture, a dearth of such studies have been investigated in South Asian context (Boyar et al., 2007; Shaffer, Joplin, & Hsu, 2011). The factors determining work demand and its magnitude are subject to variation in national context such as labour laws, culture, workplace relationship, position of the women in the society, economic stability of the country etc. and therefore, findings from one study cannot be generalised to another dissimilar context (e.g. Annor & Burchell, 2018; Hassan, Dollard, & Winefield, 2010). Consequently, the present study aims at investigating the factors determining work demand in Sri Lankan context as a microcosm of collectivist cultures in South Asia.

Drawing on Hofstede's dominant cultural framework, Sri Lanka that is similar to India is a large power distance country. Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p.61). Moreover, Hofstede et al. (2010) suggest that unequal relationships between superiors and subordinates and hierarchical systems are more prevalent in a large power distance country. The hierarchical system engenders large numbers of supervisory personnel and the boss is a "benevolent autocrat" or "good father" where employees are afraid of disagreeing with their superiors and taking extra burdens giving more pressure at the workplace (see Jin, Ford, & Chen, 2013). Moreover, the relationships between superior and subordinate are emotional. Thus, the employer-employee relationship is said to be moral like a family link, and thus relationships prevail over tasks. Albeit these factors